Scapegoating the 'Other': A Qualitative Study of Anti-Immigrant Rhetoric and Xenophobia in South African Social Media

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Abstract. This qualitative study examined drivers of anti-immigrant rhetoric in South Africa through social media analysis. Online comments from TikTok videos of opposition leaders' speeches were thematically analysed using a postpositivist approach. Findings revealed xenophobic hostility rooted in isolationist history, post-apartheid frustrations, and perceived threats around resources. Immigration was frequently scapegoated for problems like unemployment. Dashed expectations after the end of apartheid emerged as underpinning anger manifesting as xenophobia. Some leaders exhibited denialism tendencies in dismissing xenophobic violence as mere criminality. The multi-dimensional theoretical framework integrating ethnic competition theory and critical discourse analysis provided insight on complex material and discursive factors propagating xenophobia. The study elucidates relationships between political rhetoric, media discourses and public attitudes. It highlights needs for public education on immigration myths, stronger regulations on hate speech by elites, and social integration initiatives. Most crucially, tackling inequality and unemployment is vital to address xenophobia's roots in dashed hopes post-apartheid. The research contributes contemporary data on social media discourses and anti-immigrant rhetoric in South Africa.

Keywords: xenophobia, political rhetoric, South Africa, immigration, social

Background

Xenophobia in South Africa has complex historical roots and contemporary manifestations. The racist policies and structures of the apartheid system cultivated suspicion and hostility towards outsiders, while unfulfilled expectations after the end of apartheid laid fertile ground for scapegoating immigrants for socioeconomic ills (Olofinbiyi, 2022; Yingi et al., 2023). South Africa's decades of isolation under apartheid meant citizens had little experience interacting with foreigners, fuelling fear of the 'unknown other' (Harris, 2002; Morris, 1998). As the country transitioned to democracy in the 1990s, high hopes for economic prosperity and redistribution of

resources were dashed, leaving many struggling with unemployment and inadequate housing and services.

These frustrations boiled over into deadly xenophobic violence as early as 1994, with the 'Buyelekhaya' attacks targeting Mozambican, Zimbabwean and Malawian immigrants (Yingi et al., 2023). Outbreaks of violence specifically targeting African immigrants recurred in 2008, 2015 and 2019 across cities including Johannesburg, Cape Town and Durban. Over 200 people have been killed in xenophobic attacks since 1994, with thousands displaced and businesses destroyed (Human Rights Watch, 2020; Yingi et al., 2023). The violence has predominantly erupted in townships and informal settlements, where competition over resources and services is perceived to be most acute.

Underpinning these attacks are complex social and political dynamics. Apartheid's divide and rule tactics cultivated suspicion between groups, while post-apartheid socioeconomic frustrations have created fertile ground for scapegoating immigrants (Minga, 2015; Mubangizi, 2021). Statements by political leaders frequently place blame on immigrants for problems like crime, unemployment, and pressure on services (Akinola, 2017). At times, politicians have directly fueled xenophobic sentiments for political gain (Pierce et al., 2022). Implicit bias within state institutions like the police force further entrenches anti-immigrant attitudes (Dahlberg & Thapar-Björkert, 2023; Harris et al., 2001). Problematic media portrayals that exaggerate immigrant numbers and criminality reinforce xenophobic narratives (Nkala & Masuku, 2023).

Xenophobia thus arises from a complex interplay of historical isolationism, unmet economic expectations, inequality, problematic political rhetoric, and biased institutions. While immigrants may add pressure on service delivery, infrastructure, and jobs, they are not solely responsible for South Africa's challenges. Ultimately, dashed hopes of an inclusive, prosperous post-apartheid society underlie much of the xenophobic scapegoating (Tshaka, 2016; Yingi et al., 2023). Tackling inequality, unemployment and biased institutions is critical, as is reframing political and media rhetoric on immigration. With leadership and structural change, the tide of xenophobic violence may be stemmed.

South Africa has a complex history of migration shaped by its apartheid past and post-apartheid frustrations. As Morris (1998) explains, decades of isolationist apartheid rule meant citizens had little experience interacting with foreigners, fueling fear and distrust of outsiders. Furthermore, the racist structures and policies

of apartheid cultivated suspicion between groups (Minga, 2015). The transition to democracy in 1994 raised hopes for greater equality and prosperity, but many of these expectations went unfulfilled. This disappointment laid the groundwork for scapegoating immigrants for socioeconomic problems (Tshaka, 2016; Yingi et al., 2023).

According to Mubangizi (2021), dashed hopes after the end of apartheid rule created fertile conditions for xenophobic hostility. Immigrants became convenient targets for citizens' anger over lack of progress. South Africa's former isolation meant citizens were prone to perceiving foreigners as threatening (Duncan, 2012). As Tella and Ogunnibi (2014) argue, unmet promises of the post-apartheid era fueled immigrant scapegoating. Outbreaks of anti-immigrant violence have occurred periodically since 1994, with significant episodes in 2008, 2015, and 2019 (Human Rights Watch, 2020).

Underlying these attacks are multifaceted social and political dynamics. As Harris (2002) notes, apartheid's divide and rule tactics bred intergroup suspicion. Furthermore, post-apartheid frustrations over unemployment, inequality, and inadequate services have boiled over into xenophobic violence concentrated in townships and informal settlements (Mubangizi, 2021). Immigrants are often blamed for stealing jobs, dominating businesses, spreading crime, and burdening social services, despite a lack of evidence for these claims (Mbiyozo, 2018).

According to Akinola (2017), statements by political elites frequently place responsibility on immigrants for South Africa's problems, at times intentionally fomenting xenophobia for electoral gain. Implicit bias within state institutions like the police also entrenches anti-immigrant attitudes (Dahlberg & Thapar-Björkert, 2023). Meanwhile, exaggerated and stereotypical media portrayals propagate xenophobic narratives (Nkala & Masuku, 2023). Tackling the roots of xenophobic hostility requires policy reforms to reduce inequality and unemployment, public education campaigns, stronger hate speech regulations, and initiatives to facilitate social integration. With committed leadership, South Africa may overcome this complex challenge.

Theoretical Framework

This study examines anti-immigrant sentiments in South Africa through the lenses of ethnic competition theory and discourse analysis. Ethnic competition theory argues that actual and perceived competition between ethnic groups breeds intergroup hostility and negative attitudes (Olzak, 1992). As immigrant populations

grow, native groups may see threats to economic resources and political power, spurring anti-immigrant rhetoric and exclusionist attitudes (Quillian, 1995). Discourse analysis focuses on how language and representations construct social realities and power dynamics. Political and media discourses shape public attitudes by framing immigrants in particular ways (Van Dijk, 1993). These theoretical lenses are relevant within South Africa's complex history. Under apartheid, institutionalized racism cultivated suspicion of outsiders. Transition to democracy in 1994 led to hopes for an equal and non-racial society. However, unmet hopes after the end of white rule also laid ground for immigrant scapegoating (Tshaka, 2016). Ethnic competition theory suggests economic frustrations and demographic shifts drive anti-immigrantism. Discourse analysis reveals how politicized rhetoric and media representations amplify xenophobia.

At the individual level, education, income, and other socioeconomic factors signify vulnerability to competition over resources and jobs. Discourse analysis examines rhetorical patterns and linguistic techniques in the political speeches and social media comments. Framing immigrants as "flooding" the country or "stealing" jobs reflects threat constructions, as does dehumanizing language (Esses et al., 2013). A multi-dimensional analysis combining structural factors and social constructions is warranted. Group threat theory argues that actual conflicts over resources create negative outgroup attitudes (Blumer, 1958). But symbolic threats shaped by representations are also important, as stereotypes and propaganda can intensify xenophobia even absent genuine conflicts (Stephan et al., 2015). Integrating the material and the discursive provides a more complete understanding. Political rhetoric plays a key role in shaping public attitudes on immigration (Bos et al., 2016). Elites can purposefully foment xenophobia for electoral ends (Krzyżanowski et al., 2018). This study analyses leaders' speeches and resultant social media commentary to unpack this dynamic. The data in this study provides insight into how anti-immigrant tropes manifest linguistically and spread within online spaces, illuminating complex interactions between political rhetoric, media discourses and public attitudes.

Critical discourse analysis sees racist and xenophobic language as reflecting and reproducing wider societal power relations (Wodak & Reisigl, 2015). The political speeches construct immigrants as a burden stealing South Africans' jobs and resources. This othering discourse propagates historical marginalization of outsiders. Commenters amplify anti-immigrant hostility, demonstrating the rippling impacts of

elite rhetoric. Foucault's theories of power/knowledge enrich this critical analysis, revealing circulations of power within discourses and their ideological effects (Hall, 2001). Anti-immigrant rhetoric exerts power by framing immigrants as economic and cultural threats. The audience internalizes and replicates these messages, underscoring their hegemonic influence. Such othering discourses perpetuate the symbolic boundaries and hierarchies of the apartheid era into today's South Africa.

In combination, these theories elucidate complex drivers of anti-immigrant attitudes, from structural conditions to political agency to identity constructions. The study provides empirical insight into these dynamics through content analysis of salient rhetorical data. Discourse analysis allows deconstructing how speeches racially frame immigrants as dangerous outsiders. Ethnic competition theory explains how demographic contexts and economic grievances create fertile ground for such othering narratives to flourish and fuel xenophobic public sentiments. This multifaceted theoretical framework contextualizes the research findings within deeper social forces.

Research Methodology

This study utilized a qualitative approach to examine anti-immigrant sentiments and political rhetoric on social media in response to speeches by three opposition leaders in South Africa. A postpositivist paradigm informed the research, as the aim was to explore people's subjective perspectives and experiences related to a social phenomenon (Creswell, 2017). The goal was to understand the range of attitudes and beliefs towards immigrants and immigration policies expressed by TikTok users in response to the leaders' speeches. Data was generated through online ethnography, specifically by examining user comments in response to three TikTok videos featuring political speeches. The two videos featured speeches by two leaders stating their respective positions on the migration question in South Africa. The videos were part of interviews with political leaders that were shared on social media. It should also be noted that the videos and comments were made within the context of political grandstanding in preparation for the forthcoming elections in South Africa in 2024. Video A showed a leader from an opposition party stating that if elected, they would mass deport immigrants and close businesses that hire them, blaming foreigners for lack of jobs and youth unemployment. This video had over 16,000 likes and 2,600 comments as of October 2023, indicating strong user engagement. The leader in Video A argued, "We will mass deport them, we will close businesses that hires illegal foreigners, we don't have time, we don't want them. We

want them out of this country because our people don't have jobs. We have 60 % youth employment, and you tell me you still want to give Zimbabweans jobs. In 2024 something is going to happen… there are going home." While Video B featured a different opposition leader arguing that deporting immigrants would not solve South Africa's problems. This video had over 47,000 likes and 3,900 comments as of October 2023, also evidencing significant user interaction. The leader in Video B explained, "Foreigners are not the problem. Even if we deport all foreigners, that will not address the problems in South Africa." Purposive sampling was used to identify these two videos based on their relevance to the research topic (Ritchie et al., 2013). The comments on these videos were extracted using the Extract Comments website and analysed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis involved identifying, analysing and reporting patterns and themes from the data (Clarke & Braun, 2017). An inductive approach was taken, allowing themes to emerge directly from the data. Various steps were taken to ensure validity and rigor, including member checking, peer debriefing, and providing a detailed account of the data collection and analysis procedures (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The researcher's positionality and potential biases were also addressed through reflexivity. Ethical issues such as informed consent for using online data were considered in accordance with best practices for internet-mediated research (Markham & Buchanan, 2012). The sampling, data generation and analysis methods were appropriately aligned with the qualitative, postpositivist approach of the study. A sample size of around 25 comments per video will be used to reach a point of data saturation. The methods facilitated an in-depth exploration of people's perspectives related to anti-immigrant rhetoric and allowed new understandings to emerge, consistent with the aims of qualitative research. The next section presents the findings from this study.

Emerging themes for the findings

The findings from this study are presented using emerging themes from the data analysis. The themes are anti-immigrant rhetoric, economic competition, scapegoating, dashed expectation, and denialism.

Anti-immigrant rhetoric

The social media comments reflect strong anti-immigrant rhetoric and intolerance. One user commented "Blame everyone but the government" (Thabo, 2023). The TikTok comments further revealed strong anti-immigrant rhetoric, particularly directed at Zimbabweans. Words like "hate", "threats", "angry", and "shouting" characterize how some view the anti-immigrant opposition party leader's

stance on immigrants. One commenter accuses him of having "so much hate" while another says his "anger will never get u anywhere bro cool down". Others labelled immigrants as "zama zamas" (luyolo, 2023) and accused them of stealing jobs meant for South Africans (dan, 2023). Overall, the tone from numerous comments reflects hostility and intolerance towards immigrants. This aligns with the view that xenophobia arises from hostility and distrust cultivated under apartheid and frustration over unmet economic expectations post-apartheid (Minga, 2015; Tshaka, 2016). As Mubangizi (2021) notes, dashed hopes after independence created fertile ground for scapegoating immigrants. The anti-immigrant rhetoric in the data reflects these prejudices and economic insecurities.

Economic competition

Many comments accuse immigrants of dominating jobs and economic opportunities. One states, "this people don't employ themselves, shouldn't he be focusing on the people employing them" (lerato, 2023), while another argues "foreigners are the best" (nyaba, 2023) at securing employment. A common perception in the comments is that immigrants compete with South Africans for economic opportunities and resources. As the literature argues, competition in townships and informal settlements over "jobs, businesses, resources and services" fuels anti-immigrant sentiment. Comments blame immigrants for "taking" jobs, with one saying, "They don't employ themselves, shouldn't he be focusing on the people employing them" (Busi, 2023). Another argues that immigrants being willing to accept lower wages drives hiring preferences. Resentment also emerges towards immigrant-owned businesses, like one comment stating "where are the multi-billion-rand businesses" owned by citizens. The data reflects a zero-sum view of the economy, where gains for immigrants mean losses for South Africans. These views resonate with the arguments that link anti-immigrant sentiments with how post-apartheid hopes for inclusive prosperity were unmet, leaving many struggling with joblessness (Yingi et al., 2023). This disappointment bred xenophobic scapegoating of immigrants for economic woes. As Tella and Ogunnibi (2014) explain, foreigners provide a convenient target for citizens' anger over unkept promises. The data illustrates such economic competition grievances.

Scapegoating

Immigrants, especially Zimbabweans, are frequently scapegoated for problems like crime and unemployment. One user accuses Zimbabweans of

"running" shops at the expense of South Africans (Mdu, 2023). In multiple comments, immigrants are scapegoated for South Africa's problems. Zimbabweans in particular are blamed for unemployment, with one saying "I'm at home my boss fired me for nothing wrong I did and she hired a foreigner" (Thembi, 2023). Immigrants are also accused of causing crime, with a commenter asking "How are we going to maintain social order" without border controls (Thabo, 2023). These sentiments echo the literature describing immigrants being blamed for "socioeconomic ills" in South Africa. Scapegoating provides an outlet for frustrations over lack of progress since apartheid's end. As revealed above, unmet expectations after apartheid laid ground for scapegoating immigrants (Tshaka, 2016). As the isolation hypothesis suggests, South Africa's former isolationism cultivated fear of outsiders (Duncan, 2012). Scapegoating arose as immigrants were blamed for economic shortcomings (Tella & Ogunnibi, 2014). The blaming of Zimbabweans in the data reflects this defensive, xenophobic scapegoating.

Dashed expectations

Disillusionment over unmet expectations threads through many comments. As the the literature review in the background describes, hopes for inclusive prosperity after apartheid gave way to economic exclusion and inequality. One commenter pointedly states that unemployed youth "are living off of gogos pension" rather than working (Busi, 2023). High expectations of redistribution and empowerment were dashed, fuelling resentment. Multiple comments express disappointment in leaders for not delivering change. As one says, "we have a lot of money being looted by our very own" that should be used for "service delivery." Unfulfilled hopes underpin the desire to scapegoat immigrants and feed into populist anti-immigrant rhetoric. Comments reflect disappointment with the unfulfilled promises of the post-apartheid era. One argues "this guy is doing so much to be voted in power. Show him some love please South Africans" (Legend, 2023), suggesting leaders have not met citizen's needs. As discussed in the background, the transition to democracy raised hopes for economic gains which never materialized for many (Tshaka, 2016; Yingi et al., 2023). Anger over dashed expectations fuelled xenophobic scapegoating. The data exhibits this dissatisfaction with government performance.

Denialism

The data from commenters illustrated the ongoing denialism trend by some politicians on the phenomenon of xenophobia. One commenter outrightly states

"Blame everyone but the government" (Loreto, 2023) in response to anti-immigrant rhetoric from an opposition politician. This implies the government deflects responsibility for xenophobia onto immigrants and other targets rather than accepting its own role in fostering prejudiced attitudes. State institutions like the police force, which research shows reflects anti-immigrant biases, are not confronted (Dahlberg & Thapar-Bjorkert, 2023). Another comment asks the politician "What about that foreigner interviewing you????" (Thabile, 2023), a statement that itself denies xenophobia by implying immigrants cannot be loyal, patriotic citizens. Furthermore, multiple commenters express disappointment in the ruling ANC party for corruption, lack of service delivery, and unfulfilled expectations of an equitable post-apartheid society. By scapegoating immigrants, leaders can avoid accountability for policy failures that drive inequality and unemployment. Dashed hopes since apartheid's end also fuel xenophobic denialism, as immigrants become easy targets for citizens' anger over lack of progress. Until the state acknowledges xenophobia's roots and citizens address their own complicity, denialism will enable anti-immigrant violence to continue unchecked. Confronting xenophobia requires honesty and collective responsibility from leaders and citizens alike.

Some political leaders in South Africa have denied the existence of xenophobia, instead dismissing violent attacks on immigrants as merely generalized criminality. This tendency towards denialism was evident in a news headline referenced in the comments stating "C.R vows to stem the tide of xenophobic attack" (Daily News, 2022). By labelling overtly xenophobic assaults as just violent crime unrelated to anti-immigrant prejudices, officials absolve the state and citizens of culpability. Xenophobia is reduced to sporadic criminality rather than a systemic issue rooted in South African society. As scholar Olofinbiyi (2022) explains, the government's refusal to acknowledge xenophobia and its underlying causes enables further hostile attitudes and violence towards immigrants. By denying that xenophobia exists, authorities do nothing to address the historical, political and economic drivers of anti-immigrant sentiment. Citizens are not encouraged to challenge their own prejudices or reflect on how rhetoric from leaders and media fuels hostility. Immigrants remain demonized as the 'other' rather than recognized as equal human beings deserving of dignity and protection. The next section presents a discussion of the findings in this study.

Discussion of findings

The presentation of findings reveals complex dynamics underpinning anti-immigrant rhetoric and xenophobia in South Africa. A key theme is the strong anti-immigrant sentiments expressed in the TikTok comments, reflecting hostility towards foreigners that aligns with South Africa's isolationist history and post-apartheid frustrations. As the background describes, decades of apartheid cultivating distrust of outsiders combined with unmet expectations after the transition to democracy laid ground for xenophobic scapegoating (Harris, 2002; Tshaka, 2016). The vitriolic, dehumanizing rhetoric in the data demonstrates how thoroughly these prejudices permeate society.

Furthermore, the findings highlight perceptions of economic competition as driving anti-immigrant hostility. Research shows immigrants often take menial jobs shunned by citizens and contribute to economic growth (Sultan, 2019). However, a zero-sum mentality emerges in the comments where gains for immigrants mean losses for South Africans. This worldview overlooks systemic issues around skills shortages and fails to recognize the positive economic contributions of immigrants. As Mbiyozo (2018) explains, xenophobic rhetoric frequently relies on stereotyping African foreigners as 'stealing' jobs and resources. The data exhibits such unsubstantiated beliefs.

In addition, the tendency to scapegoat immigrants for problems like unemployment and crime appears strongly in the findings. Zimbabweans in particular are singled out for blame. As the literature establishes, unfulfilled expectations after apartheid created fertile ground for scapegoating (Tella & Ogunnibi, 2014). Immigrants provide convenient targets for citizens' frustrations. However, research shows immigrants are not responsible for South Africa's socioeconomic challenges. Xenophobic scapegoating deflects from state accountability for policy failures that drive inequality and poverty. The findings demonstrate this defensive scapegoating mentality. Moreover, the data exhibits dashed hopes post-apartheid breeding anti-immigrant hostility. Anger over lack of economic upliftment for the majority manifests in resentment towards immigrants rather than government. populist politicians exploit these frustrations through xenophobic rhetoric, as the denialism findings reveal. By refusing to acknowledge xenophobia, authorities enable prejudice while absolving the state of responsibility.

Despite immigrants making up a small share of South Africa's population, they have become scapegoats for broader economic frustrations. The data unpacked in this study reveal the gulf between the citizens' misperceptions and the reality

depicted by the empirical evidence as captured by official statistics. Official statistics indicate approximately 2.4 to 4 million foreign nationals reside in South Africa, comprising around 3-7% of the total population (Institute for Security Studies, 2022; Statistics South Africa, 2022). However, the South African Social Attitudes Survey (2021) found nearly half of South Africans believe immigrant figures are vastly higher, between 17 to 40 million. While actual population data may have some margin of error, typical inaccuracies in national censuses are in the range of 2-5%, far lower than the misperceptions among many citizens. More interesting are the official figures for South Africa's unemployment rate in the first quarter of 2023 was recorded at 32,9 %, and is among the highest in the world. According to the Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS), this is an increase of 0,2 of a percentage point compared to the fourth quarter of 2022. Essentially, this reveals a disconnect between reality and public attitudes aligns with patterns noted in the draft paper, where immigrants are rhetorically constructed as threatening outsiders flooding the country and stealing resources. The exaggeration of immigrant figures reflects a moral panic that serves elite political interests but distorts reality. Combating such disinformation and problematization of minority groups is crucial to fostering social cohesion and inclusive national identities.

Overall, the data provides evidence for the complex roots of xenophobia described in the background literature. However, the small sample of social media comments may limit generalizability. More extensive data gathering across platforms could establish more robust, representative findings. Comparative studies of xenophobia within political discourse vs among citizens is another potential avenue. The findings have several practical implications. They highlight the need to counter xenophobic myths around immigration and economics with facts. Civic education dispelling harmful stereotypes could help, alongside public messaging that recognizes immigrants' contributions. Tightening regulations on hate speech may curb dangerous rhetoric from politicians and media. Initiatives that facilitate social integration and contact between citizens and immigrants show promise for reducing prejudice (Levy et al., 2017). Most crucially, tackling inequality, unemployment and corruption is vital to address the roots of dashed expectations and frustrations. With honest confrontation of its past, South Africa may gradually overcome the complex legacies of isolation and oppression that feed xenophobic hostility.

Conclusion

This study deployed a multifaceted theoretical framework integrating ethnic competition theory and critical discourse analysis to unpack complex drivers of anti-immigrant rhetoric and xenophobia in contemporary South Africa. The qualitative analysis of social media responses to opposition leaders' speeches revealed strong anti-immigrant hostility rooted in isolationist history, unmet expectations post-apartheid, and perceived threats around resources and jobs. Comments exhibited xenophobic scapegoating of foreigners, especially Zimbabweans, for problems like unemployment and criminality. Dashed hopes after the end of apartheid emerged as an undercurrent feeding frustrations that manifest in anti-immigrant rhetoric. The data also evidenced tendencies towards denialism, where politicians dismiss xenophobic violence as mere criminality, absolving the state and citizens of responsibility.

Together, the findings underscore the value of examining xenophobia through intersecting theoretical lenses encompassing material conditions, political rhetoric, media discourses and public attitudes. Ethnic competition theory illuminated how demographic shifts and actual or perceived threats to economic resources can breed intergroup hostility, as evidenced by grievances around immigrants "stealing" jobs. Critical discourse analysis revealed the power of dehumanizing, othering rhetoric from leaders in shaping anti-immigrant prejudices. Techniques like exaggerating immigrant figures and blaming foreigners for South Africa's woes propagate dangerous myths. The data exhibits how such symbolic threats ride alongside, and intensify, realistic conflicts around resources and services.

This synthesis of structural and discursive dimensions provides a more holistic understanding of xenophobia's complex roots. The study makes several scholarly contributions. It adds empirical evidence on social media discourses to the body of literature on xenophobia in South Africa. The data provides contemporary insight into how anti-immigrant rhetoric manifests online, spreading dangerous stereotypes. The findings also elucidate the relationship between populist political speech and public opinions. Opposition leaders' statements had a strong influence in amplifying xenophobic hostility among citizens. This aligns with arguments on elite's moral responsibility to avoid divisive language, though more work could examine these dynamics. Overall, the multi-dimensional theoretical approach

undertaken here could inform future studies seeking to move beyond surface explanations.

On a practical level, the research highlights need for public messaging correcting misperceptions on immigration's economic impacts, stronger hate speech regulations, and integration initiatives. Most critically, tackling inequality, unemployment and corruption would address root causes. With committed leadership and policy reforms, the cyclical eruptions of xenophobic violence may be overcome. South Africa still retains promise to achieve the inclusive, equitable society that its transition symbolized. But fulfilling that promise requires honest confrontation of the past and collective responsibility for change. It necessitates moving beyond scapegoating and forging bonds of solidarity across all who call South Africa home. This study contributes one small step on that long road, working to dismantle prejudices towards building a society where all can thrive, regardless of origins. Therein lies the flickering hope against xenophobia's darkness.

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